

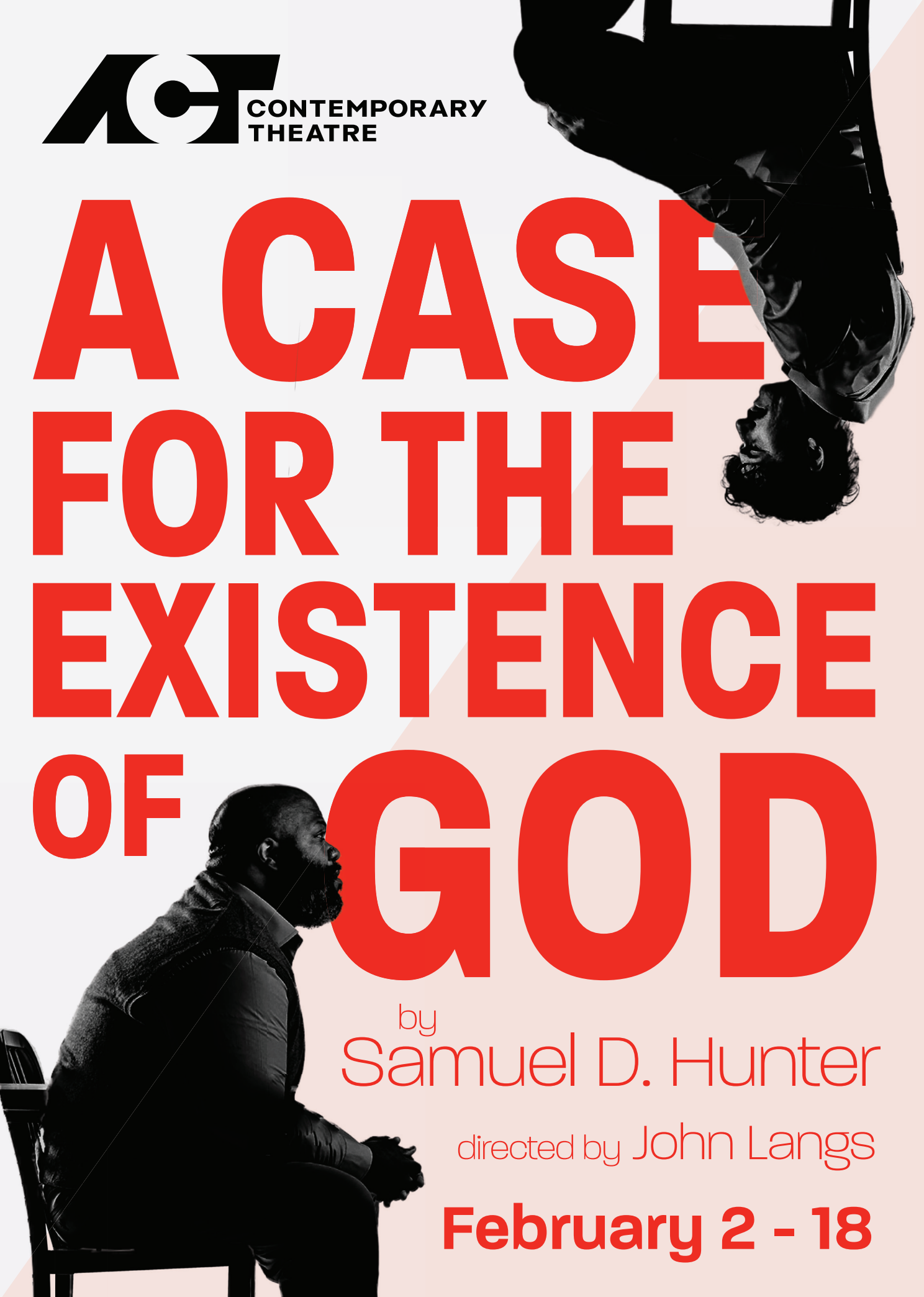


A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

by
Samuel D. Hunter

directed by John Langs

February 2 - 18





presents

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

By Samuel D. Hunter

Directed by John Langs
February 2 – 18, 2024

CAST

Conner Neddersen* – Ryan
Nathaniel Tenenbaum** – Keith

CREATIVE TEAM

John Langs – Director
Parmida Ziaei – Scenic Design
Danielle Nieves – Costume Design
Connie Yun* – Lighting Design
Maggie Rogers – Sound Design
Thorn Michaels – Assistant Lighting Designer

STAGE MANAGEMENT

JR Welden* – Stage Manager
Larcyn Burnett – Production Assistant
Bret Torbeck* – Stage Manager, February 17–18

Theatre and Season Partners



World Premiere produced by Signature Theatre, New York City Paige Evans, Artistic Director; Tim McClimon Interim Executive Director
A Case for the Existence of God was additionally developed at the 2020 Ojai Playwrights Conference; Robert Egan, Artistic Director/Producer.

A workshop production of *A Case for the Existence of God*, directed by Paul Lazar, was presented in Ketchum, Idaho by Field Daze, Sawtooth Productions, the Argyros, and Laughing Stock Theater.

A Case for the Existence of God was also developed through a residency at SPACE on Ryder Farm.

*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

**ACT Core Company member



CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

By Samuel D. Hunter

Directed by John Langs

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PATRON INFORMATION

During the Show

Photography, video, or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited.

Audience members are cordially reminded to silence all electronic devices.

Please do not walk on the stage before, during, or after the show.

Food and Drink

Concessions are available in the lobby. Concessions accepts cards or cash. No outside food or drink is allowed.

Group Sales

Groups of 10 or more can save on most productions. For more information, go to acttheatre.org/visit/ discounts.

Smoking Policy

Smoking is NOT allowed in any part of the building or within 25 feet of the entrance.

Firearms Policy

No firearms of any kind are allowed in any part of the building.

Lost and Found

Please contact the Box Office at boxoffice@acttheatre.org or call 206.292.7676. For Box Office hours visit acttheatre.org/visit/box-office

Merchandise

Winter merchandise will be available in the lobby before and after the show. Payment by credit card only. While supplies last.

COVID Safety Policy

ACT's COVID-19 safety policies will continue to be reviewed and updated based on the advice of local health authorities, federal government guidance, and evolving circumstances.

Accessibility

ACT offers the Figaro MobiTxt® Closed Captioning System for audience members who are Deaf or hard of hearing. This system is offered at all performances in most of our theatres. ACT is also equipped with the Williams Sound® Audio Equipment, which amplifies stage sounds with the aid of headsets and also provides sound for our Audio Description performances. All devices can be reserved at the time of ticket purchase and/or requested upon arrival to the theatre (ask staff for assistance). Both devices can be reserved at the time of ticket purchase or picked up at our Accessibility table.

Large Print Programs are available and can be picked up at our Accessibility table.

Audio Description and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation is offered at the following performances:

A Case for the Existence of God, Saturday, February 17 at 2pm

STEW, Saturday, March 30 at 2pm

The Lehman Trilogy, Saturday, May 11 at 2pm

ACT Contemporary Theatre

Contact Information

700 Union Street, Seattle, WA 98101
Phone: 206.292.7676
acttheatre.org



A Letter from the Director and Artistic Director JOHN LANGS

My introduction to this play occurred in an ordinary way – a text message from a Core Company member and longtime colleague. The text read:

“I’ve just seen something very beautiful I think you should investigate.”

Receiving messages like this is one of the great pleasures of this work, so, of course, I took the bait. Just hearing the title *A Case for the Existence of God*, I had so many expectations about what the argument at the center of this play could be. Science vs. Faith. Nurture vs. Nature. Agnostics vs. Religion. Like a great set-up, all these expectations were upended upon my first read.

Samuel D. Hunter, whose works describe people going about their modern lives in Idaho, has always subverted audience expectations. He has become a true chronicler of our time by amplifying the existential questions that have become more complex as our society continues to move at the speed of light, bombarding us with an overload of information and expectations.

After my first read, which was a deeply moving experience, someone asked me what the play was about. The phrase that came to mind was “adulting in the age of anxiety.” For me, the story resonated with the question of how our humanity must navigate the complicated systems and stage gates of being an adult living in a capitalist system. These systems that were set in motion by pioneers and captains of industry like the Lehman brothers who you will meet at the end of this season. These systems continue to affect our lives, the lives of Ryan and Keith, who you will meet today, and the women of *STEW*, who will take the stage in our next production in March.

While we can argue about the effects of capitalism, it’s hard to debate the fact that you either participate in the process or get left behind. The human expense of survival in a modern world is real. The stakes go sky high when we try to make the world better for those in our care than it has been for us. On this journey, sometimes the only balm offered is our ability to connect to our fellow passengers. To see one another fully and to be fully seen is an act of courage and faith. I am deeply grateful for the artists in the world who have the faith and courage to reaffirm this case.

Thank you for being here.

John Langs

***“To see one another fully
and to be fully seen is an
act of courage and faith.”***

“...adulting in the age of anxiety.”



A Letter from Board Chair

CYNTHIA HUFFMAN

Dear Friends,

Thank you for joining us at ACT Contemporary Theatre!

First, I want to express our deepest gratitude to our former Managing Director Anita Shah, who recently completed her two-year tenure. Anita's unwavering dedication and remarkable achievements during her time here have left an indelible mark on our organization. Her ability to forge strong bonds with civic and arts leaders, nurture relationships with union partners, and act as a dynamic community relations leader has been truly invaluable. As Anita embarks on new adventures, we extend our warmest wishes for continued success.

As we continue our search for our next Managing Director, I am happy to introduce Michael Ross as our newly appointed Interim Managing Director. Michael brings a wealth of experience and a profound passion for the performing arts to ACT and is well-equipped to guide us through this transition period.

As we start the new year, I wanted to mention some highlights of our 2023/24 Season to date!

In late October we kicked off the Inaugural New Works Northwest (NW2) Festival, a three-day celebration of new theatrical works from five Seattle playwrights: Andrew Lee Creech, Steven Dietz, Katie Forgetting, Reginald André Jackson, and Maggie Lee. The festival was a great success with sold-out readings, and we look forward to our next one this fall.

We also launched our first Community Day during our run of *Cambodian Rock Band* with over 400 attendees! "Khmer Community Day: Reatrei Romvong" featured performances of Khmer classical dance by Khmer Amarak Performing Arts, Romvong demonstrations, and a lively live music set by DJ Sabzi.

We look forward to our upcoming Community Days events: *A Case for the Existence of God* on February 10, *STEW* on March 17, and *The Lehman Trilogy* on May 5.

As we start the second half of our season, what I am most thrilled about are the abundant audiences, both new and returning, coming to the theatre! We were delighted to have many full and sold-out houses for our performances of *Cambodian Rock Band*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *The Dina Martina Christmas Show*.

We are so happy to welcome all of you, and we thank you for choosing ACT Contemporary Theatre.
Happy 2024!

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia Huffman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cynthia Huffman

ACT has renewed our commitment to our mission, values, culture, and the creation of New Works. We are publishing them here to invite conversation and hold ourselves accountable.

OUR MISSION

ACT is a contemporary theatre where artistic ambition and civic engagement unite.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ACT Contemporary Theatre acknowledges that the land on which this theatre stands is part of the ancestral homelands of the **Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Duwamish, Snoqualmie, and Tulalip** peoples along the waterways of the **Salish Sea**. We honor the **29 federally recognized sovereign nations** within the state of Washington as well as **the many other unrecognized peoples in this area**.

As we gather and strive to share stories of our world with joy and clarity, **we honor with gratitude the original stewards and storytellers of these lands — past, present, and future**. We value the immense contributions, sacrifices and **resilience of Indigenous People** here, and fully **acknowledge** the profound multi-generational impact that colonization has had on Native people everywhere, including ongoing disparities, racism, and political **INVISIBILITY**. **To heal, we need truth and understanding that everyone actively participates in, together.**

This land acknowledgment is one small act in recognizing the importance of continuing to care for the land and acknowledge our important relationship with the original people of this place we call home who are still here. **We are all in relationship to each other.**

WE BELIEVE

ACT STATEMENT OF VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

ACT believes in the power of theatre to change lives. For too long, the lives of our institution has focused on have been predominantly white and able-bodied. We acknowledge that ACT has worked inside biased systems that have continued to center only a small group of our global community. We want our art to be joyful and our work to have a spirit of adventure, so we commit to building thoughtful guardrails to bolster an environment where we can all be brave and buoyant together.

Developed by the Staff, Core Company and Trustees of ACT Contemporary Theatre, this statement of values and commitments was created to ensure the well-being of artists, collaborators, board members, and staff to engage in the spirit of an ever-improving process.

OUR VALUES

We are people-led and art-centered.

We believe in creating a safe space in which to do dangerous work.

We depend on each other for clear, honest, and responsible communication.

We believe that the building of excellent art is risky and joyful, and takes time.

We strive to ensure that artistic trust is baked into the way we work.



See a PDF of our "We Believe" document.

UP NEXT AT ACT

STEW

by Zora Howard

directed by Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako

March 15 - 31

"Intimate, funny,
and heartbreaking."

-The New Yorker



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ACT
CONTEMPORARY
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THE 2022 Tony Winner for Best Play! LEHMAN TRILOGY

by
Stefano
Massini

adapted by
Ben Power

directed by
John Langs

April 26 - May 12



**CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE**



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Who's Who in *A Case for the Existence of God*

CREATIVE TEAM

Larcyn Burnett (they/them)

Production Assistant

Larcyn Burnett is a queer freelance stage manager and they are excited to be making their ACT debut! Recent credits include: *White Christmas*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Wonder Boy: A Radio Play*, *Afterwords* (The 5th Avenue Theatre), and *The Book of Will* (Santa Cruz Shakespeare). They hold a BFA in Performance Production with a Stage Management concentration from Cornish College of the Arts.

John Langs (he/him)

Director

John Langs has served as Artistic Director of ACT Contemporary Theatre since 2016. He joined ACT in 2013 as Associate Artistic Director. Langs's 16-year freelance career afforded him the opportunity to work with many prestigious theatre companies across the country. He has directed productions at Playwrights Horizons, Ensemble Studio Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Circle X, Resident Ensemble Players, New Century Theatre Company, Washington Ensemble Theatre, and Seattle Shakespeare Company. Langs received his directing degree from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Some of his favorite directing credits include *The Shaggs Philosophy of the World* (Los Angeles Drama Critic Circle Award for Best Original Musical), *Brothers Karamazov* (seven LADCC Awards including Best Production of the year and Best Direction), and directing Kurt Beattie in *King Lear*. Langs received the first annual Seattle Gregory Award honoring excellence in direction for *The Adding Machine*. As a dedicated fan of original work, Langs has shepherded over a dozen projects to their premiere production.

Thorn Michaels

Assistant Lighting Designer

Thorn Michaels has designed and assisted for The 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Opera, Village Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, ACT, Santa Fe Playhouse, Kentucky Opera, Lincoln Center, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, San Francisco Opera, New York City Ballet, and others. She was the 2016 Gilbert Hemsley intern and holds an MFA in lighting design from the University of Washington. For more about her work, please visit thornmichaels.com.

Danielle Nieves

Costume Design

Danielle Nieves is thrilled to be back with the wonderful artists at ACT. Her work has been seen previously at ACT (*Every Brilliant Thing*), The 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Village Theatre, The Old Globe, Dallas Theater Center, South Coast Repertory, Goodman Theatre, St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and Cleveland Playhouse. Off-Broadway credits: *Pity in History*, *No End of Blame*, *Gertrude The Cry*, and *Lovesong of the Electric Bear* for PTP/NYC at the Atlantic Stage 2. Danielle holds an MFA in Costume Design from the University of California Irvine and a curatorial certification for Japanese and Western costumes from the Kyoto Costume Institute. For more information, visit daniellenieves.com.

Maggie Rogers

Sound Design

Maggie Rogers is a multi-disciplinary artist who proudly hails from Louisville, KY. Previously at ACT she was the sound designer for *Every Brilliant Thing* and *Yen*, and the dramaturg for *Romeo + Juliet*. She is the former Artistic Director of Washington Ensemble Theatre and works closely with Cherdonna Shinatra as her creative partner. For more information, visit rogersmaggie.com.

* Member of AEA

† Member of ACT Core Company

Bret Torbeck*

Stage Manager February 17–18

Bret Torbeck is happy to be able to join the company of *A Case For The Existence Of God*. Last at ACT Theatre, Bret was the assistant stage manager for *Sweat*. Recently at Seattle Rep, he was the stage manager for *The Tempest* and for *What the Constitution Means to Me*. He also works at Seattle Opera and was a freelance stage manager nationally for three decades before settling down to be an associate professor of stage management at Cornish College of the Arts and a board member of Seattle Public Theater. He is grateful for his family, friends, students, colleagues, and to be able to take part in live theater!

JR Welden*

Stage Manager

Recent credits include—at The 5th: *White Christmas*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into The Woods*, *The Wiz*, *Choir Boy*, *Afterwords*, *West Side Story*, *Austen's Pride*, *Rock of Ages*, *Hunchback*, *Kiss Me Kate*, and *The Pajama Game*. At ACT: *Mary Stuart*, *Eruydice*, *The Underpants*, *Miss Witherspoon*, and 16 years of *A Christmas Carol*. He also stage managed many productions at Seattle Rep, Intiman, and Mark Taper Forum. He adopted his beautiful son, Travis, after becoming a licensed foster parent.

Connie Yun[†] (she/her)

Lighting Design

Connie Yun is pleased to return to ACT where she last designed *Wolf Play*. Recent Seattle area designs include *Samson and Delilah* for Seattle Opera and the world premiere of *The Boy Who Kissed the Sky* for Seattle Children's Theatre. Other recent designs include *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato* for Curtis Opera Theatre, *The Marriage of Figaro* at Portland Opera and New Orleans Opera, *The Royal Shepherd* at Orpheus PDX, and *La Cenerentola* at Kentucky Opera. She has also designed for Seattle Rep, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Tacoma Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Palm Beach Opera, and Madison Opera. Upcoming engagements include *STEW* for ACT, *Madame Butterfly* for Opera Philadelphia, and *Maria de Buenos Aires* for Florentine Opera. Connie is a Core Company member for ACT, member of United Scenic Artists Local USA-829, and mentor with the ETC Fred Foster Student Mentorship Program. For more information, visit connieyun.com

Parmida Ziaei (she/her)

Scenic Design

Parmida Ziaei is an Iranian multidisciplinary artist and designer based in Seattle and the co-founder of Seda Iranian Theatre Ensemble. Parmida has been a scenic and production designer with many Seattle theaters including ACT, Village Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, ArtsWest, Taproot Theatre, and Seattle Public Theater, among others. When not designing, Parmida performs and teaches as a movement artist. Parmida has been the recipient of multiple residencies including the Summer of 2023 Body, Space, Time Residency at UW Department of Dance and the 2022 Northwest Creator Residency at Village Theatre. For more information, visit parmidziaei.com.

CAST



Conner Neddersen^{*}

Ryan

Conner Neddersen is a local theater and television actor in Seattle, WA. He received his BFA from Cornish College of the Arts. This will be his first mainstage production at ACT since *A Christmas Carol* in 2018. Other theater credits include: Seattle Rep, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Seattle Children's Theatre, Taproot Theatre, and Strawberry Theatre Workshop. He was a member of New Century Theatre company. TV credits: NBC's *Grimm* and *A&E*.



Nathaniel Tenenbaum^{†*}

Keith

Before quarantine: *Indecent* at Seattle Rep, *UrineTown* at ACT/The 5th Avenue Theatre, *Boeing-Boeing* at TheatreO, *The Pillowman* at ActOne, and *Peter & The Starcatcher* at USF. During quarantine: Baked one strawberry cheesecake, sewed one shirt (unwearable), and played his vinyl. Post quarantine: *A Christmas Carol* (2021) at ACT, *The Wiz* at The 5th Avenue Theatre, and *Cowboy Bob* at The Alley Theatre (Pre-Broadway). Much love to my ACT Family, my Langes, & especially my Jeanie, ur one groovy far out mama.

ACT operates under agreements with the following:



This theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

ACT's **Young Core Company** presents

THE SUNLESS SCAR

*Would you
stay in the Scar-
or risk escape?*

March 8 | 7pm

March 9 | 7pm

March 10 | 2pm



**CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE**



All tickets are
Pay-What-You-Choose

by
Maggie Lee

directed by
Shana Bestock

A World Premiere
introduced at
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Erin Sutter

Katy Swensen

Carole Sykes

Barbod Tavasoli

Dominic Wolfgang Wallace

Haleigh Wanchena

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Director of People and Culture

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Head Scenic Painter

Zachary Burns
Head Audio Technician

Jae Dooley
Costume Shop Assistant

Chandler Eichele
Stage Operations Swing Technician

Nick Farwell
Stage Operations Supervisor

Melissa Gomez
First Hand / Swing Dresser / Head Crafts Artisan

Justine Halsey-Martin
Lead Props Artisan

Cal Hostetler
Lead Scenic Carpenter

Ada Karamanyan
Production Office Manager

Eric Koch
Technical Director

Sally Mellis
Head Dresser

Alyssa Montgomery
Senior Director of Production

Nick Murel
Associate Technical Director

James Nichols
Head Stage Carpenter

A G Quinn
Lead Scenic Carpenter

Jeff Scott
Scenic Charge Artist

Valerie Snyder
Head Draper

Logan Thomas
Head Electrician

Jason Tribby
Head Scenic Carpenter

Christine Tschirgi
Costume Shop Manager

Cedric Wright
Prop Shop Manager

FOR THIS PRODUCTION

Dave Baldwin
Emily Kettler
Theresa Oborn
Sergio Vivas
Stephanie Watson
Overhire Scenic Carpenters

Jeremy Hollis
Scenic Assistant

Chloe Kirkwood
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Overhire Props Artisans

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If you would like to volunteer at ACT, please email
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ENGAGE THE STAGE

student matinees

Let ACT
Contemporary
Theatre's stage be
your classroom!

ACT's unique **Engage the Stage** program invites students to experience a theatre production in a **dynamic learning environment**. Recommended for 6-12th grade and college classrooms.

Explore the magic and the making of theatre through **up-close conversations** with theatre professionals about their craft, careers, and connection to the play.

- » Hear **directly from the actors and members of the creative team** about their artistic process
- » Watch an **excerpt from our professional production** to see them in action with full costumes, set, and production elements
- » Discuss further in a **deep-dive Q&A**

Energize your classroom with experiential learning and new perspectives. **Ignite passion and curiosity in the arts** as we actively demonstrate how theatre activates your curriculum – and your life.

Engage the Stage introduces students to different approaches to creative pathways, and shows how culture, academics, art, tech, and science collaborate in **powerful storytelling**.



The practicality and poetry of metaphor: *As 3 generations of women cook together on stage, how do we bring out the metaphors of recipes and legacy while also actually cooking stew?*

March 26 at 11am



The theatricality of history: *How do 3 actors create an epic sense of scale and bring history alive in a way that only theatre can?*

May 7 at 11am

Tickets: \$12/student, 1 free chaperone per 10 6-12th grade students. Additional chaperone tickets are \$12. Contact groups@acttheatre.org to reserve your tickets.

Students and chaperones are invited to use their Engage the Stage ticket to return and see a regular public performance for free! (Subject to availability)



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CHALLENGE HOW STORIES ARE TOLD.

The bold, thought-provoking productions you see on ACT's stages are only made possible through our generous supporters.

Your donations are critical as ticket sales alone cover less than 50% of our plays' expenses. **Donate today** to join us in the commitment to keep live theatre **accessible** and **affordable** for all. Supporters who give \$100 or more annually enjoy access to special **behind-the-scenes experiences**.

DONATE TODAY



FALLS LEGACY CIRCLE

**Do you love ACT Contemporary Theatre?
Power the future!**

You can help the curtain stay up! It's simple – name ACT as a beneficiary of your retirement plan, life insurance policy, or other account.

We will include you in the Falls Legacy Circle when you let us know you've named ACT as the beneficiary of an account or in your estate plans.

For more information or to inform us of your plans, please contact Director of Development Jill Robinson at jill.robinson@acttheatre.org.



THANK YOU!

ACT Contemporary Theatre is home to a luminescent Community of Creators made of writers, actors, directors, designers, technicians, and supporters.

ACT gratefully recognizes all donors of \$1 and more in alphabetical order.

This list reflects donations made October 2022 - December 2023.

A-E

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A Conversation with Yussef El Guindi and John Langs

Edited by McKenna Themm



As ACT continues its mission of creating bold new works, we wanted to check in with our Core Company member Yussef El Guindi. We are proud to be the company Yussef calls home and are thrilled to celebrate his success. ACT's Artistic Director John Langs sat down with Yussef El Guindi in January to talk about Yussef's career and his time with ACT.

John: Would you share how ACT has played a role in your journey as a playwright?

Yussef: When you stepped into the role as Artistic Director, I wasn't sure what to expect, since usually when someone new comes in, they want to bring their own writers, but you invited me to be part of the Core Company after our first meeting.

I can truly say that being at ACT furthered my career. I had achieved some prominence nationally with some of my other productions, but ACT took me to the next level. It was very important for me to have a theatre, especially a local theater, that was open to my work. You can only sustain "I love writing" up to a certain point. You need to know someone will catch the play when you put it out into the world.

Part of the journey of every playwright is finding the right platform to showcase your work. A couple of smaller theaters around the country, and locally, had been

instrumental in giving me the confidence to keep going. But ACT was the first big LORT theatre to take an interest in my plays. Having ACT say "We want you and your voice" turbo-charged my output. The material began to pour out. Having ACT in my corner is important for me psychologically because I know there's at least one theatre that is open to considering my work.

John: Collaboration has always been a strong point in your work. Can you share a memorable collaboration experience you had with our team at ACT?

Yussef: Writing can be an isolating task. With novels and short stories it's just you, and later the editor. With screenplays, it sometimes happens that the script is taken off your hands and other people come in to continue its journey. It's essentially just a blueprint, a starting off point. You give it up and someone else builds the house.

On the other hand, a play *is* the house. You've built the essential structure. Which allows others to now enter and be a part of the building process. It comes to life in the hands of costume designers, actors, composers, set designers, directors, lighting technicians, and others.

One of the most exciting moments of each production for me is that first design meeting—seeing the sets and ideas presented that will animate the play. I remember when we were in production for *Hotter Than Egypt*, I saw "the head" (see below) come down on the set, with the lighting and music attending its descent, and I just thought "wow." It was more than I had hoped for.

The next big thing for Yussef is taking People of the Book to New York City to play Off-Broadway this fall with our own John Langs once again at the helm as director. Yussef and John are both eager to build the show at Urban Stages and are excited to present this masterful work to New York audiences.

We look forward to future collaborations with Yussef at ACT Contemporary Theatre!

For the full interview, please scan here:

